

Shakespearean Swine Hits Duxbury Beach

By AMY ROLLINS

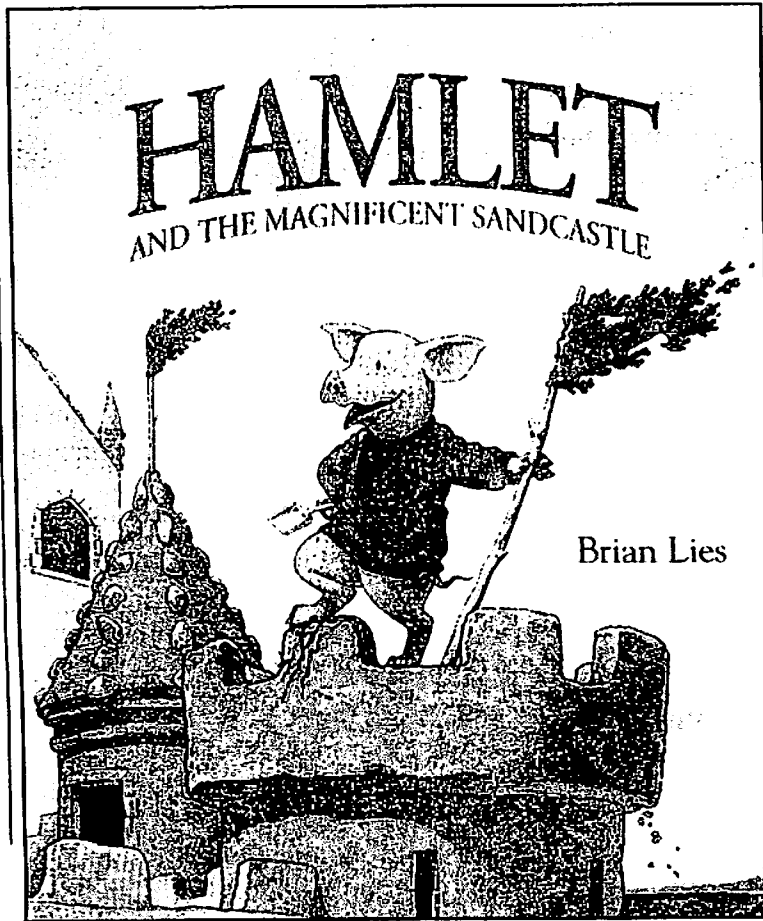
Savvy Duxbury readers will recognize familiar sights hidden within the pages of the new Children's book by Duxbury author Brian Lies, *Hamlet and the Magnificent Sandcastle*.

Released June 1, Lies, whose name rhymes with "cheese", said readers will recognize Hamlet from his first book, *Hamlet and the Amazing Chinese Dragon Kite* which was published in 1994.



Brian Lies

While in Nantucket recovering from the release of his first book, Lies was lounging on the beach when he realized the consistency and texture of the sand there was perfect for sandcastle-building.



"It was very build-able sand," he said. And having created *Hamlet*, the enthusiastic protagonist from his first novel, "I just knew that if Hamlet was there he would have wanted to jump in and build the world's biggest sandcastle. I rushed back from the beach to jot that idea down, and it sat in a drawer since 1994."

Last year, Lies moved to Duxbury with his family, wife Laurel a DHS '80 graduate, and his daughter, only to be inspired once again by the beach.

Lies grew up in Princeton, New Jersey, a town, he notes, that had no shortage of beach. But the beach in his new book is actually modeled on Duxbury Beach and on that stretch of beach he remembered in Nantucket.

Lies says the keen-eyed Duxbury reader will recognize a few familiar locations throughout his book. "If you look carefully, there's a lot of Duxbury hidden in the book. The roofline of the FarFar's building had always reminded me of a train station, so I used it in for the train station in the very beginning of the story."

Lies, who graduated from the honors program at Brown, had ambitions to be a political cartoonist. After his attempts failed, letters of rejection pointed him in a new direction. The letters which denied Lies his dream of newspaper fame, told him they liked his ideas, but not his art.

Encouraged, Lies enrolled in The Museum School, at the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.

He spent two and a half years studying there before leaving to pursue the newspaper offers his improved work garnered.

A lucky twist of fate put the art director of children's publishing company Houghton Mifflin in line in front of Lies at a gift shop in Cambridge. She overheard him speaking about his work and asked to see his portfolio.

Since then, Lies has illustrated 14 children's books. "But now that my daughter is of school age, my time is expanding. I think a burst of creativity is foreseeable in the coming years," he added.

Lies' two *Hamlet* books are the first he has both authored and illustrated. The writing presented a new and challenging project for Lies—characters development.

The characters in *Hamlet* and the *Magnificent Sandcastle* are clearly defined, Lies says. "Hamlet and Quince are literal opposites." *Hamlet* is full of unbridled enthusiasm and reminds Lies of himself in the third grade.

When asked why the name *Hamlet* was chosen for his main character, Lies explained that he was having trouble making a particular pig character he had been working on more approachable to readers.

"There was just no way to sympathize with this guy, he was annoying. Then, it hit me to make him a rather tragic figure. When I told my father on

the phone he said, 'Oh, kind of like a Hamlet.' And I thought, 'exactly!' And I really liked the idea of *Hamlet* for a pig. My mother was a high school English teacher, so there was a lot of quoting Shakespeare around the dining room table."

With the name *Hamlet* under his belt, Lies looked to Shakespeare for further inspiration. He found a line in the play, *Hamlet*, which compared someone to a "fretted porcupine".

"I really liked the idea of a fretful porcupine. Plus- I liked the 'pork' in porcupine, it was a nice play on words with *Hamlet*."

For *Hamlet*'s best friend, the fretful porcupine, Lies needed a name with some significance. He flipped through his edition of *Riverside Shakespeare* and saw "Quince" in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Lies remembered his childhood best friend had a Quincy bush in his backyard, full of prickly spikes, which scratched when "one had to retrieve a Frisbee or two". "Quince was a short, sharp word, it fit with the character I

was trying to create," he said.

Although Hamlet spends this book on the dunes of Duxbury beach, Lies said he sees Hamlet as living in a small New England town. "perhaps with a vaguely Vermont-ish landscape." Lies also said that Hamlet "hasn't exactly told me where he lives." Lies likes to let his stories and characters take shape of their own will. He does not target a specific age range in his audience because he feels a specifically aimed project can warp the story. He believes the story should stand on its own first; he does not want his work to be too conscious or conniving.

The father of a young daughter who finished Kindergarten this June, Lies works at his studio at home. "Life is a lot less glamorous than people think," he explained. A typical day includes getting his daughter on the bus in the morning and working until lunch in his studio where he has a writing and a drawing table.

"My life now as an author is really the culmination of a 5th grade dream," Lies said. "An author once came to class to speak to us when we had a book project to do. At the time I did not know that it could be a job-writing and drawing. I thought it was so cool."

Nowadays, Lies life is filled with book signings, classroom presentations not unlike the one he witnessed in 5th grade, and baking brownies with his young daughter.

Even as he enjoys the release of his latest book, and the launching of an East Coast book tour, he is looking ahead to future projects. Next up is a non-fiction book about popcorn. "It looks like we'll be spending the next couple of months cooking up batches of popcorn and studying it under a jeweler's loop," Lies said.

Lies will be at Westwinds Bookshop August 4th and is planning a program at the Duxbury Free Library sometime this summer.

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